

## *Toward Greater Unity and Greater Strength*

THE HOUSE OF DELEGATES meeting in March was privileged to hear timely and perceptive statements from two able and dedicated leaders of our profession. The statements of the outgoing and incoming presidents of the California Medical Association are reported elsewhere in this issue. They merit thoughtful attention.

An unusual and singularly impressive part of Dr. Crum's presentation unfortunately cannot be reproduced in these pages. It was a motion picture which dramatically symbolized the fragmentation which saps if indeed it will not destroy the strength of the medical profession. In the film a woodcutter with a chain saw systematically removes one sturdy limb after another from what had obviously once been a strong and noble tree, to the accompaniment of loud and sometimes raucous cries of "Right," "Right," "Right" from physicians frustrated by what is occurring in medical care. All that finally remained was a stump with a few very severely pruned limbs. The viability of this once mighty tree was obviously greatly impaired if not totally lost.

The message was clear. The medical profession has been and is being cut to pieces, often to the acclaim of well-meaning physicians and others who disagree with what is going on and what is being done about it, and unless all or much of it can be gotten back together again, a once mighty profession will surely lose more of its strength and perhaps even its viability as an independent entity.

The fragmentation which has occurred needs little documentation. The proliferation of medical science has given rise to a myriad of scientific specialty societies which serve specialized interests and often claim the major professional allegiance

of their members. Specialization has also grown among organizations within the health care delivery system with the appearance of powerful organizational advocates of public health, group practice, private practice, hospitals, medical schools and many other essential segments of what should be a more coordinated rather than a more fragmented health care system. And at the ideological level physicians and others who seek to maintain and preserve a system of medical practice which they know to have worked well for them and their patients, find themselves resisting and sometimes resenting a growing criticism of this traditional practice and a growing advocacy of a different sense of social, economic and political responsibility and commitment in medical and health care. All these divisions, scientific, organizational and ideological, have brought about a substantial lessening of the traditional strength and viability of the medical profession, and of the efficiency and effectiveness of medical care as a whole.

Fortunately there are signs that some reversal has begun. Once again the California Medical Association appears to be in the lead. More than ten years ago it began by creating the Scientific Board to strengthen the ties between the CMA and the scientific specialty societies. Later when the Advisory Panels became part of the Scientific Board structure these ties were greatly strengthened and new important links were established in each specialty with each of California's eight medical schools. The Scientific Board has become an effective instrument to coordinate medical science in California and to bring it more effectively to bear upon problems of medical practice and medical care in this state. Representatives of the Scientific Board now sit as members of the House of Delegates but it yet remains for them to be given the right to vote. When this occurs an enormously important symbolic step will have been taken. The CMA will have reincorporated specialized medical science not only into its deliberations but into its decision-making process as well.

The approach to incorporating other organizations representing other facets of the health care delivery system into the deliberations and decision-making processes of CMA is far less developed. But a start has been made. For some years now CMA has made an increasing commitment of time, energy and substance to bring about a better exchange of information and where possible to collaborate with other organizations and agencies

to improve one or another aspect of medical or health care. The emphasis has been on collaboration and cooperation where there are areas of common interest and on the resolution of disagreements where this is possible. The net result has been significant progress toward greater unity and more coordination of effort. It is probable that as much has been accomplished here in California as anywhere in the nation, but there remains much more to be done.

Progress in overcoming barriers and misunderstanding between older and younger physicians has been rapid and truly rewarding to all. For several years there has been increasing involvement of CMA with young physicians (interns and residents) and physicians-to-be (medical students), and vice versa. All have come to the realization that physicians, young physicians and physicians-to-be must work as closely and effectively together as possible if the common goal of better medicine and better health care for all is to be achieved. At its recent meeting this was recog-

nized by the House of Delegates which took the enormously significant, and in a sense symbolic, step of giving voting representation in the House to representatives of these young physicians and physicians-to-be.

Yes, there is impressive evidence that important steps are being taken to get it all back together. These are welcome steps toward the greater unity and greater strength which are needed if a great profession is to remain a viable and sturdy independent entity. The leadership of the California Medical Association is to be commended and supported. It is not to be forgotten that the same forces which produced greater specialization and fragmentation also, and in similar measure, produce greater interdependence among the specialized and fragmented segments of medical science and medical care. It is the interdependence which now needs the more particular attention from organized medicine and others concerned with health care. In California, at least, it is beginning to get this attention.

—MSMW